

Makerfield By-Election 2026

Timeline, candidates, polling, and analysis of the Makerfield by-election on 18 June 2026.

- [Makerfield By-Election 2026](#)
- [Makerfield Candidates](#)
 - [Rebecca Shepherd - Restore Britain Candidate, Makerfield](#)
 - [Andy Burnham - Labour Candidate, Makerfield](#)
 - [Robert Kenyon - Reform UK Candidate, Makerfield](#)
 - [Jake Austin - Lib Dem Candidate, Makerfield](#)
 - [James Booth - Green Candidate, Makerfield](#)
 - [Michael Winstanley - Conservative Candidate, Makerfield](#)
 - [Peter Ward - Rejoin EU Candidate, Makerfield](#)
 - [Alan Howlin Laud Hope - Loony Party Candidate, Makerfield](#)
- [Greater Manchester Mayoral](#)
 - [Greater Manchester Mayoral — Current State](#)
- [Greater Manchester Mayoral — Candidates](#)
 - [Andy Burnham — Mayor & Labour Candidate](#)
 - [Other Parties — Potential Candidates](#)

Makerfield By-Election 2026

Makerfield By-Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 (evening) **Expected by-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Context

The Makerfield by-election was triggered when incumbent Labour MP **Josh Simons** stood down to make way for **Andy Burnham**, the Greater Manchester Mayor, who wants to return to Westminster as a springboard for a potential Labour leadership challenge against Keir Starmer.

The constituency has been a safe Labour seat for decades. However, Reform UK is running an aggressive campaign and polling suggests the race is tighter than any previous Labour hold would suggest. **Bloomberg** described Makerfield voters as "the 77,000 voters set to decide the next UK Prime Minister."

Current state of play (25 May): The race remains a knife-edge. Burnham (LAB 43%) leads Reform's Kenyon (REF 40%) by just 3 points — within the margin of error. The right-wing vote is splitting three ways (Reform 40%, Restore Britain 7%, Tory 2%) which could hand Burnham a narrow win. Kenyon faces a growing controversy over comments calling abortion "cowardly murder." Sunday politics shows were dominated by Makerfield — Alan Johnson said Labour MPs would be "daft" to back Burnham, Lisa Nandy called leadership speculation "froth and nonsense," and Starmer insisted he "won't walk away." Meanwhile, **Nigel Farage has publicly warned Elon Musk** that backing Restore Britain is splitting the right-wing vote and playing into Labour's hands, marking a significant rift between Reform and the Rupert Lowe/Musk axis.

Key Dates

Date	Event
14 May 2026	Andy Burnham announces intention to stand in Makerfield by-election
14 May 2026	Josh Simons announces he is standing down
15 May 2026	BBC reports likely date of 18 June for the by-election

Date	Event
14 May 2026	Nigel Farage says Reform will "throw absolutely everything at it"
16 May 2026	Survation forecast: With Burnham — LAB 45%, REFORM 42%. Without Burnham — REFORM 53%, LAB 27%
18 May 2026	Restore Britain announces by-election candidate
19 May 2026	Andy Burnham confirmed as Labour candidate for Makerfield by-election (The Guardian)
19 May 2026	Reform UK announces Robert Kenyon as candidate
20 May 2026	Reform UK candidate Robert Kenyon revealed to have history of social media controversies; permanently banned from Twitter. Allegations include misogynistic posts, sharing content from a Holocaust denier, and Covid conspiracy theories
20 May 2026	Conservatives name Michael Winstanley as candidate (BBC)
20 May 2026	Date of by-election confirmed: 18 June (ITV, Politico)
21 May 2026	Green Party selects Chris Kennedy as candidate
21 May 2026	Chris Kennedy withdraws within hours over antisemitic social media posts (shared post calling attack on Jewish ambulances a "false flag"). A Green Party spokesperson said he "apologises for the offence caused"
21 May 2026	Greens consider not standing in Makerfield following Kennedy's withdrawal, with some voices suggesting backing Labour's Andy Burnham to avoid splitting the anti-Reform vote (FT)
21 May 2026	House of Commons Library publishes analysis: "Andy Burnham and Makerfield: Can a mayor be an MP?"
22 May 2026	Andy Burnham launches his campaign in Ashton
22 May 2026	Oasis give Andy Burnham permission to use "Some Might Say" in campaign
22 May 2026	Liberal Democrats announce Stockport councillor Jake Austin as candidate
22 May 2026	Keir Starmer says he WILL campaign for Andy Burnham in Makerfield: "It is Labour versus Reform"
22 May 2026	Green Party selects a nurse as replacement candidate — name TBC (BBC)
22 May 2026	Restore Britain candidate named: Rebecca Shepherd — Wigan small business owner (equestrian equipment)

Date	Event
22 May 2026	Burnham states position on immigration, saying a "stronger grip" is needed, blaming Boris Johnson's government for letting it "drift"
22 May 2026	Farage and Reform team spark controversy with unannounced visit to Hamlet Wigan CIC — a community centre for adults with special needs. Charity boss Gemma Crompton writes to Farage demanding apology over "intimidating and overwhelming" atmosphere
22 May 2026	Burnham on EU: Says there is a "long-term case" for UK to return to the EU, but will not make it a campaign issue in Makerfield
22 May 2026	Five arrested by GMP in Tameside over alleged local elections offences — "bogus independents" probe; four men and a woman aged 23-47 held on suspicion of conspiracy to defraud
22 May 2026	Burnham launches campaign with "clarion call for change", promising to shake up "tired" British politics (HuffPost, ITV, Guardian)
22 May 2026	Wes Streeting says he would have been accused of "trying to pull a fast one" if he'd triggered a leadership contest before giving Burnham the chance to become an MP
23 May 2026	Survation/Sunday Times poll (369 respondents): Burnham (LAB) 43%, Kenyon (REFORM) 40%, Shepherd (Restore Britain) 7%, Austin (Lib Dem) 4%, Green 3%, Winstanley (CON) 2%, Other 1%
23 May 2026	Lucy Powell (Deputy Labour Leader) campaigns for Burnham in Makerfield
23 May 2026	Reform UK's Zia Yusuf (Home Affairs Spokesperson) joins Robert Kenyon campaigning in Makerfield
23 May 2026	Reform MP Sarah Pochin (Runcorn and Helsby) campaigns with Kenyon in Makerfield
23 May 2026	Nigel Farage responds to poll showing Reform 3 points behind Burnham
24 May 2026	Rejoin EU announces Peter Ward (Manchester barrister) as candidate. Party says "rejoining the EU has come back into the British political debate in a big way"
24 May 2026	Alan "Howlin" Laud Hope (Official Monster Raving Loony Party) confirmed as candidate
24 May 2026	Robert Kenyon calls abortion "cowardly murder" — The Observer/Byline Times report reveals Kenyon called abortion "cowardly murder" and suggested women lie about rape to obtain abortions. Dominoes across 6+ subreddits and major engagement on X/Twitter

Date	Event
24 May 2026	Byline Times publishes exposé on Kenyon's deleted Twitter history — 419-tweet archive reveals further controversial content; Kenyon's previous Reform account was mysteriously suspended
24 May 2026	Carol Vorderman slams Kenyon over lewd comments resurfacing — calls him "vile online abuser"
24 May 2026	Elon Musk endorses Restore Britain — splits the right-wing vote, could help Burnham
24 May 2026	Reform UK launches "hard work bonus" tax policy IN Makerfield — Nigel Farage pledges to scrap income tax on overtime above 40 hrs/week for under-£75k earners. Robert Jenrick says they'd "clamp down" on abuse of scheme. Directly targets Burnham's working-class base
24 May 2026	Simon Danczuk (ex-Labour MP) campaigning with Kenyon in Makerfield, predicts Reform win
24 May 2026	Kelvin MacKenzie pleads for Farage and Rupert Lowe to unite — warning split right-wing vote hands Makerfield to Burnham
24 May 2026	Darren Jones confirms he will campaign for Burnham in Makerfield (per BBC) — calls Burnham "a brilliant politician"
24 May 2026	Nigel Farage warns Elon Musk he is "splitting the Right" by backing Restore Britain in Makerfield. Farage says Musk "has decided he will try to split the Right of British politics as best he can. This is supporting a party that's one man with a social media account." Robert Jenrick says Farage was a "victim" of hacking (Telegraph)
24 May 2026	RTE publishes analysis — "The battle of the Makerfield bye-election begins in earnest"
24 May 2026	The Week in Polls (Substack) — Burnham, Makerfield and Labour: the latest polls analysis
25 May 2026	Sunday politics shows dominated by Makerfield: Alan Johnson says Labour MPs would be "daft" to back Burnham. Lisa Nandy calls speculation "froth and nonsense." Starmer insists he "won't walk away." Kenyon said Survation poll reflects what he's hearing from constituents

Candidates

Party	Candidate	Notes
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Labour	Andy Burnham	Greater Manchester Mayor, former Health Secretary. Called it a "vote to change Labour". Launched campaign 22 May in Ashton. Positioned himself slightly to the right on immigration ("stronger grip needed") while keeping door open on EU membership long-term. New Survation poll (23 May) puts him on 43% — a knife-edge race
Reform UK	Robert Kenyon	Wigan councillor and plumber. Multiple controversies: suspended Twitter/X account, allegations of misogynistic posts, sharing Holocaust denier content, Covid conspiracy theories, and now (24 May) calling abortion "cowardly murder" and suggesting women lie about rape for abortions. Byline Times published a 419-tweet archive of his deleted account. Carol Vorderman called him "vile online abuser". Reform insists it is "fully backing" him. Simon Danczuk campaigning with him. Poll puts him at 40%
Liberal Democrats	Jake Austin	Stockport councillor, born in the Makerfield constituency, stood against Burnham for GM Mayor in 2024 (came 6th). Poll: 4%
Green Party	TBC (nurse replacement)	Original candidate Chris Kennedy selected 21 May, withdrew same day over antisemitic social media posts. BBC reports a nurse has been selected as replacement; name pending confirmation. Some voices within the party suggest Greens may not stand at all to avoid splitting the left/anti-Reform vote. Poll: 3%
Restore Britain	Rebecca Shepherd	Wigan small business owner (equestrian equipment). Rupert Lowe says she's "exactly the type of person we need in politics — not career politicians". Kate Hoey criticised Restore's decision to stand a candidate. Elon Musk has endorsed Restore Britain. Poll: 7%
Conservatives	Michael Winstanley	Named 20 May 2026. Questions over Kemi Badenoch's approach to the by-election have been raised. Poll: 2%
Rejoin EU	Peter Ward	Manchester barrister. Announced 24 May 2026. Party says EU debate has "come back in a big way"

Official Monster Raving Loony Party	Alan "Howlin" Laud Hope	Confirmed as candidate
Other / Independents	TBC	Other candidates may yet emerge

Polling & Forecasts

- **Survation (16 May):** With Burnham standing — LAB 45%, REFORM 42%. Without Burnham — REFORM 53%, LAB 27%
- **Survation/Sunday Times (23 May, n=369):** Burnham (LAB) 43%, Kenyon (REFORM) 40%, Shepherd (Restore Britain) 7%, Austin (Lib Dem) 4%, Green 3%, Winstanley (CON) 2%, Other 1% — knife-edge race
- **Britain Predicts (16 May):** Adjusted forecast for Burnham as candidate shows Labour ahead but Reform close
- **Reddit analysis (22 May):** User on r/reformuk crunches local election figures scaled to GE turnout — even with generous swing assumptions (Burnham gets 30% of Green/Lib Dem votes, 10% of Con/Reform), Reform still wins by ~300 votes
- **PollCheck:** Tracking page at pollcheck.co.uk/by-elections/makerfield — last updated 21 May, lists 5 confirmed candidates
- **Local context:** Reform won all 8 council wards in the May 2026 locals with approx 50% of the vote, suggesting strong ground-level support

Reddit Highlights

Thread	Subreddit	Score	Link
Andy Burnham announces intention to stand	r/ukpolitics	495	Link
Green candidate withdraws over social media	r/ukpolitics	175	Link
Reform candidate "friends" with neo-fascist leader	r/NotTheOnionUK	512	Link
Reform candidate permanently banned from Twitter	r/FuckNigelFarage	495	Link
Survation forecast: LAB 45% / REFORM 42% with Burnham	r/ukpolitics	208	Link
Restore Britain announces candidate	r/unitedkingdom	161	Link

Thread	Subreddit	Score	Link
Streeting backs Burnham as "best chance"	r/unitedkingdom	267	Link
Britain Predicts forecast for Burnham	r/LabourUK	51	Link
Green Party selects Chris Kennedy	r/UKGreens	67	Link
Who do you expect to win? (poll)	r/UnitedKingdomPolls	5	Link
Greens consider not standing (discussion)	r/UKGreens	18	Link
Restore name candidate Rebecca Shepherd	r/reformuk	8	Link
Lib Dems announce Jake Austin	r/ukpolitics	16	Link
Green Party needs centralised vetting (post-Kennedy)	r/UKGreens	94	Link
Makerfield prediction (Redditor's own model)	r/reformuk	3	Link
Will Reform's candidate be undone by allegations?	r/reformuk	0	Link
Survation/Sunday Times poll: 43-40 knife-edge	r/ukpolitics	—	Link
NEW: Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder"	r/unitedkingdom	229	Link
NEW: Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder"	r/ukpolitics	111	Link
NEW: What happened to the Tory party? (Makerfield 2nd place history)	r/AskBrits	235	Link
NEW: Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder"	r/LabourUK	39	Link
NEW: Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder"	r/uknews	7	Link
NEW: Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder"	r/Wigan	16	Link

Thread	Subreddit	Score	Link
NEW: Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder" — image	r/FuckNigel Farage	112	Link
NEW: Rejoin EU Party announces Peter Ward as candidate	r/brexit	28	Link
NEW: First Makerfield Poll — Labour+3 ahead of June 18	r/YAPms	31	Link
NEW: Farage warns Musk over splitting right-wing vote in Makerfield	r/reformuk	1	Link

X/Twitter Highlights (via Nitter, 24 May 2026)

Account	Content	Engagement
@Telegraph	Elon Musk backs Restore Britain	👍169 ❤️920
@SimonDanczuk	Endorses Kenyon, predicts Reform win in Makerfield	👍216 ❤️859
@ArchRose90	"Two horse race" between Burnham and Reform	👍202 ❤️667
@BylineTimes	Kenyon's deleted tweets exposé 📄 — 419-tweet archive	👍308 ❤️424
@PunishedEldric	Restore win = shockwaves across British politics	👍111 ❤️506
@nativistconcern	Satirical policy comparison between candidates	👍79 ❤️832
@KelvinMacKenzie	Pleading for Farage & Lowe to unite the right	—
@CarolVorderman	Slams Kenyon as "vile online abuser"	—
@DarrenJones	Senior minister confirms he'll campaign for Burnham	—

Key narratives on X:

- By-election (June 18) is a proxy fight for Labour leadership — if Burnham wins, Starmer is weakened
 - Right-wing vote splitting 3 ways (Reform 40%, Restore 7%, Tory 2%) handing Burnham a narrow path
 - Reform won all 8 council wards in May locals with ~50% — ground game advantage
 - Musk endorsement of Restore Britain is a wildcard, splitting the right even further
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What It Means

- **If Burnham wins:** Labour holds Makerfield but with a vastly reduced majority vs historic results. A Labour leadership contest is likely to follow, potentially leading to a new PM by autumn. Burnham's campaign launch explicitly positioned this as a "vote to change Labour."
 - **If Reform wins:** A seismic shock — Reform taking a previously safe Labour seat in Greater Manchester would be a massive blow to Starmer, almost certainly triggering a leadership contest immediately. Some amateur modelling (based on local election data) suggests Reform could edge it even with generous swing assumptions towards Burnham.
 - The by-election is set for the same week Starmer is due at the G7 summit in France.
 - Burnham does not have to step down as GM Mayor unless he wins the seat.
 - **Labour leadership backdrop:** Wes Streeting has resigned from cabinet and signalled a leadership challenge. Starmer faces growing calls to set out a timeline for departure. Angela Rayner reportedly rejected an offer to replace Streeting as Health Secretary. Lisa Nandy called the speculation "froth and nonsense."
 - **Both main candidates dogged by controversies:** Reform's Robert Kenyon faces multiple social media allegations — now including calling abortion "cowardly murder" and a 419-tweet Byline Times exposé; the Greens' original Chris Kennedy withdrew within hours. The race has been unusually dominated by scandals rather than policy.
 - **Latest poll says knife-edge:** The Survation/Sunday Times poll (23 May) puts Burnham on 43% and Reform's Kenyon on 40% — a margin of just 3 points, well within the poll's margin of error. Reform won all 8 council wards in the May locals, suggesting strong ground organisation.
 - **More candidates keep entering:** Rejoin EU and Monster Raving Loony Party have both announced candidates (24 May), further fragmenting the vote.
 - **Musk's Restore Britain endorsement** is another wildcard — splits the right-wing vote further, potentially helping Burnham by bleeding Reform support.
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Sources

- [BBC News — What does Makerfield make of by-election?](#)
- [BBC News — Rejoin EU announce Makerfield by-election candidate](#)

- [Manchester Evening News — Burnham by-election LIVE](#)
- [PollCheck — Makerfield By-Election](#)
- [The National — Reform candidate friends with fascist leader](#)
- [Green Party — Chris Kennedy selection](#)
- [BBC — Conservatives name Michael Winstanley](#)
- [BBC — Reform announces Robert Kenyon as candidate](#)
- [BBC — Lib Dems announce candidate \(Jake Austin\)](#)
- [BBC — Green Party selects nurse as candidate](#)
- [BBC — Makerfield by-election candidates announced](#)
- [The Independent — Burnham vows to 'change Labour'](#)
- [The Guardian — Burnham confirmed as candidate](#)
- [The Guardian — Burnham starts campaign with pitch for No 10](#)
- [FT — Greens consider helping Labour in Makerfield](#)
- [FT — Game on: All eyes on Makerfield by-election](#)
- [Bloomberg — The 77,000 Voters Set to Decide the Next UK Prime Minister](#)
- [Politico — High-stakes Makerfield by-election set for June 18](#)
- [The Telegraph — Makerfield by-election: Everything you need to know](#)
- [The Telegraph — Questions over Kemi Badenoch's approach to Makerfield](#)
- [HuffPost — Burnham launches campaign with 'clarion call for change'](#)
- [ITV — Burnham says backing him is 'vote to change Labour'](#)
- [New Statesman — Should the Green Party stand in Makerfield?](#)
- [LabourList — Burnham confirmed: What happens next?](#)
- [The i Paper — Labour leadership contender who will campaign for Burnham](#)
- [House of Commons Library — Can a mayor be an MP?](#)
- [Reddit — Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder" \(r/unitedkingdom\)](#)
- [Reddit — What happened to the Tory party? \(r/AskBrits\)](#)
- [Byline Times — Kenyon's deleted tweet archives \(419 tweets\)](#)

Makerfield Candidates

Profiles of all candidates standing in the 2026 Makerfield by-election.

Rebecca Shepherd - Restore Britain Candidate, Makerfield

Rebecca Shepherd — Restore Britain Candidate, Makerfield By-Election 2026

Last updated: 24 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Age	53
Location	Wigan borough, Greater Manchester — lived there "most of her adult life"
Occupation	Small business owner
Businesses	Seven Stars Equestrian (equestrian equipment shop, also known as "Pony and Horse") + Equine Escapes CIC — a Community Interest Company providing equine-based activities for children with SEND needs
Personal	Has a child who receives SEND support themselves. Husband is Dutch-Indonesian
First-time candidate	Yes — this is her first ever election campaign
Party	Restore Britain (led by Rupert Lowe, launched Feb 2026)
Democracy Club ID	139187
Campaign email	makerfield@restorebritain.org.uk

How She Got Selected

Restore Britain's first Westminster candidate. Rupert Lowe personally announced her as candidate on X/Twitter on 18 May 2026 — the post got **29,805 likes** and **5,549 retweets**. Lowe campaigned alongside her in Makerfield the day after the announcement.

She was selected over Reform UK's rumoured candidate **Tyson Fury** — a fact Restore Britain supporters on Reddit were pleased about.

Key Statements & Quotes

- "Understands first-hand the pressures facing local businesses and working families"
 - Concerned about "rising costs, excessive red tape, bureaucracy, and overregulation"
 - "Passionate advocate for improved SEND support"
 - **24 May 2026:** "We were expecting 40 people... then 150 showed up" — referring to a campaign event turnout exceeding expectations
 - Campaign slogan/framing: Restore Britain says she is "exactly the type of person we need in politics — not career politicians" (Rupert Lowe)
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Policy Platform

Based on Restore Britain's official Makerfield candidate page and campaign material:

1. **Safer streets** — targeting what the party describes as "gangs of foreign men" who harass women in Ashton
 2. **Anti-overdevelopment** — specifically in South Hindley and Winstanley
 3. **SEND reform** — avoid overdiagnosis, invest in playgrounds, targeted support for children with additional needs. Criticises the current system for creating "a growing culture of dependency"
 4. **Anti-social behaviour crackdown** — visible policing, parental responsibility
 5. **High street revival** — free parking, abolish business rates, investigate vape shops/Turkish barbers for immigration and trading standards issues
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Polling

Poll	Date	Shepherd (Restore Britain)	LAB (Burnham)	REF (Kenyon)
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Survation/Sunday Times	23 May 2026	7%	43%	40%
Survation (early)	16 May 2026	—	45%	42%

At **7%**, Shepherd's candidacy is widely seen as splitting the right-wing vote away from Reform UK. This is a critical factor in Burnham's narrow 3-point lead. Without Restore Britain in the race, Reform's 40% + Restore's 7% = 47%, which would put Reform ahead of Labour on 43%.

Local context: Reform UK won all 8 council wards in Makerfield in the May 2026 local elections with approximately 50% of the vote, suggesting strong ground-level organisation that Restore Britain will need to overcome.

Key Partnerships & Endorsements

- **Rupert Lowe** — personally selected her, has campaigned with her in Makerfield, posted multiple times promoting her
- **Elon Musk** — endorsed Restore Britain generally (24 May 2026), significantly raising the party's profile
- **Duncan Bannatyne** (Dragons' Den) — reportedly endorsed her candidacy
- **Kate Hoey** — has criticised Restore Britain's decision to stand a candidate in Makerfield, arguing it splits the right-wing vote (but no direct criticism of Shepherd herself)
- **Andrew Bridgen MP** — active supporter, posted "Restore Britain is going to shock the establishment in Makerfield" (24 May)

X/Twitter Activity (24 May 2026)

Notable tweets mentioning or by Rebecca Shepherd / Restore Britain in Makerfield:

Account	Content	Platform
English Rose [] [] [] []	"Makerfield Restore Britain candidate, Rebecca Shepherd: 'We were expecting 40 people... then 150 showed up'"	X
Ben Jones [] [] [] []	"Rebecca Shepherd is stepping up as our next Restore Britain MP—let's bring her the same patriotic victory we saw in Great Yarmouth"	X
Rupert Lowe MP	"Rebecca Shepherd and Restore Britain can win in Makerfield and send the biggest shock in British political history" (22 May)	X

Account	Content	Platform
Restore Britain	"Hundreds of Restore Britain members out across Makerfield today" (23 May) — accompanied by campaign photos	X
Ian Matthews	"Restore Britain have swooped in and delivered a Masterpiece of policies from taxi drivers to hairdressers" (24 May)	X
VoxPopuli	"Patriot with a broken-leg is out today campaigning for Restore Britain in Makerfield" (24 May)	X
The Raging Bull	"Restore Britain is going to get thousands and thousands of votes in Makerfield. We are in this to win it." (24 May)	X
Rupert Lowe MP	"Strong support from Elon Musk for Restore Britain in the Makerfield by-election. There can be no better or stronger ally from across the pond." (23 May)	X
Andrew Bridgen	"Restore Britain is going to shock the establishment in Makerfield." (24 May)	X

Reddit Discussion

Most Significant Threads

Thread	Subreddit	Score	Comments	Sentiment
Rupert Lowe announces Rebecca Shepherd as Restore Britain candidate	r/ukpolitics	93	318	Mixed/Sceptical
Makerfield Candidate announced: Rebecca Shepherd	r/RestoreBritain	122	26	Supportive
Restore name their candidate for Makerfield by-election	r/reformuk	8	7	Neutral/Mixed

Thread	Subreddit	Score	Comments	Sentiment
Restore Britain announces Makerfield by-election candidate	r/unitedkingdom	163	361	Mixed/Sceptical
First poll: LAB 43%, Reform 40%, Restore Britain 7%	r/ukpolitics	204	264	Analytical
Elon Musk backs Restore Britain	r/unitedkingdom	603	376	Overwhelmingly negative

Key Reddit Sentiment

r/ukpolitics (top comment, +153): "How does properly funding SEND fit with reducing public services/benefits/lower taxes?" — highlights the perceived contradiction between Restore Britain's small-state platform and Shepherd's SEND advocacy.

r/ukpolitics (+88): "Interesting to see how Reform perform with Restore on the ballot"

r/ukpolitics (+70): "How long before some choice Facebook posts of hers turn up?" — with reply "One week either side of the election"

r/ukpolitics (+21): "Clever politics — a working mum on benefits raising a child with special needs. Perfect candidate for working-class areas"

r/unitedkingdom (+196): "Andy Burnham will be overjoyed at the right vote split. Suspect it's sour grapes from Lowe not stepping aside for Reform"

r/unitedkingdom (+97): "A small business owner from the area sounds better than someone using the constituency for power"

r/reformuk (+8): "This has real potential to split the vote"

r/RestoreBritain (+36): Full tweet text and full-throated support

r/RestoreBritain (+13): "Get ready for backlash — her partner is Dutch with Indonesian father" — predicting internal party tensions

r/RestoreBritain (+4): "That SEND support is massive"

Notable Sceptical Comments

- **+3 on r/RestoreBritain:** "Seriously lmao? They picked someone who gets government grants for ADHD kids to see ponies"
- **+1 on r/reformuk:** "She runs a horse therapy business for ADHD kids paid by taxpayer. Married to [Dutch-Indonesian] guy. Hardly matches Restore rhetoric"

- **+56 on r/ukpolitics:** "His [Burnham's] local popularity not showing up in polls — he only leads because Restore splits Reform"
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SEND Policy — Detailed View

Shepherd's primary issue. Per a Substack piece by supporter Lance Turner (19 May), her approach:

- **"Zero tolerance for overdiagnosis"** — believes too many children are being labelled
- **Targeted investment** rather than blanket funding increases
- **Practical, community-led activities** — her own Equine Escapes CIC is the model
- Criticises the current SEND system for creating "a growing culture of dependency"

This is her strongest differentiator from other candidates and her most personal issue (she has a child receiving SEND support).

Controversies

No personal controversies found about Rebecca Shepherd herself. She has no prior political activity, no problematic social media history has been unearthed, and she has been described as a "clean candidate" by her supporters.

However, her party and association bring baggage:

- Restore Britain is described by Wikipedia and Hope Not Hate as "**far-right and right-wing**"
 - Rupert Lowe's party was formed after his split from Reform UK, driven by a personal feud with Nigel Farage
 - Elon Musk's endorsement has drawn heavy criticism
 - The "neo-fascists back Restore Britain" thread on r/unitedkingdom (score 556, 721 comments) highlights far-right support for the party
 - Her husband being Dutch-Indonesian has been flagged by some Restore Britain supporters as a potential source of internal party tension
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What It Means

- **At 7% in the polls**, Shepherd is a **kingmaker** in a knife-edge race. Every vote for Restore Britain is a vote that doesn't go to Reform. Without her on the ballot, Reform UK would likely be polling ahead of Labour.

- Rupert Lowe has explicitly stated Restore Britain is in Makerfield "to win it" — not just to split the vote. However, the 7% polling figure suggests that's aspirational rather than realistic.
 - **Restore Britain sees this as their national launchpad.** Makerfield is their first Westminster contest. A strong showing (2nd place, or close to 10%) would legitimise them as a national force.
 - **Her SEND platform** is a genuine differentiator from both Labour and Reform, but faces the obvious question: how does a small-state, tax-cutting party fund improved SEND provision?
 - **Elon Musk's endorsement** has raised Restore Britain's profile enormously, but may also be a liability with the local working-class electorate Musk's brand doesn't necessarily resonate with.
 - The right-wing vote split (Reform 40%, Restore 7%, Tory 2%) is **the deciding factor** in this race — and Rebecca Shepherd is the wildcard in that equation.
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Sources

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- [The Spectator — Steerpike on Restore's candidate \(18 May 2026\)](#)
- [Substack — Lance Turner on Shepherd's SEND policy \(19 May 2026\)](#)
- [Democracy Club — Rebecca Shepherd profile](#)
- [Reddit — Rupert Lowe announces Rebecca Shepherd \(r/ukpolitics\)](#)
- [Reddit — Makerfield Candidate announced \(r/RestoreBritain\)](#)
- [Reddit — Restore Britain announces candidate \(r/unitedkingdom\)](#)
- [Reddit — First poll: LAB 43%, Reform 40%, Restore 7% \(r/ukpolitics\)](#)
- [Manchester Evening News — Burnham by-election LIVE](#)

Andy Burnham - Labour Candidate, Makerfield

Andy Burnham — Labour Candidate, Makerfield By- Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Andrew Murray Burnham
Age	56 (born 7 January 1970)
Born	Aintree, Merseyside
Home	Leigh, Greater Manchester
Occupation	Politician (former GM Mayor, former Health Secretary)
Education	St Aelred's Catholic High School; Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge (English & Drama, BA 2:1)
Family	Married to Marie-France van Heel (since 2000), three children

Political History

Role	Years
MP for Leigh	2001–2024

Role	Years
Chief Secretary to the Treasury	2007–2008
Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport	2008–2009
Secretary of State for Health	2009–2010
Shadow Health Secretary	2010–2011, 2015–2016
Shadow Home Secretary	2011–2015
Shadow Digital, Culture, Media & Sport	2016–2017
Mayor of Greater Manchester	2017–2026 (three terms)

Selection as Makerfield Candidate

Josh Simons stood down as Makerfield MP to make way for Burnham, who wants to return to Westminster as a springboard for a potential Labour leadership challenge against Keir Starmer. Burnham was confirmed as Labour candidate on 19 May 2026.

Key Statements & Quotes

- Called his campaign a "**vote to change Labour**" — positioning himself as an alternative to Starmer
 - On immigration: says a "**stronger grip**" is needed, blaming Boris Johnson's government for letting it "drift"
 - On the EU: says there is a "**long-term case**" for UK to return, but won't make it a campaign issue in Makerfield
 - Campaign launch (22 May): pitched as a "**clarion call for change**", promising to shake up "tired" British politics
-

Policy Platform

- On the soft-left/social democratic wing of Labour
 - As GM Mayor: prioritised integrated transport (bus franchising, Metrolink expansion), social housing, devolution
 - Hillsborough campaign: key figure in pushing for full disclosure and justice
 - Advocates for proper social care settlement
-

Polling

Date	Pollster	Burnham %	Kenyon %	Margin
16 May	Survation	45%	42%	LAB +3
23 May	Survation / Sunday Times	43%	40%	LAB +3

Key Partnerships & Endorsements

- **Keir Starmer:** confirmed he WILL campaign for Burnham ("It is Labour versus Reform")
- **Lucy Powell** (Deputy Labour Leader): campaigned with him in Makerfield
- **Darren Jones:** senior minister confirmed he'd campaign
- **Wes Streeting:** backed Burnham as "best chance", said he'd have been accused of "pulling a fast one" if he'd triggered a leadership contest before giving Burnham the chance

What It Means

- If Burnham wins: Labour holds Makerfield but with vastly reduced majority. Labour leadership contest likely.
- If he loses: seismic shock — Reform taking a safe Labour seat would trigger immediate leadership crisis for Starmer
- The race is a knife-edge — Burnham leads Kenyon by just 3 points (within margin of error)
- Burnham does not have to step down as GM Mayor unless he wins the seat

Twitter/X Discussion

“ Source: Nitter search, May 2026

Burnham is the dominant figure in Twitter discourse around the by-election. Key themes:

- **The "King of the North" framing:** Twitter commentary consistently frames the by-election as a referendum on Burnham's future — "Makerfield is a set piece by-election"

for/against Andy Burnham for a GE against 'the King of the North'. The race is seen as a proxy battle between Burnham and Farage.

- **Senior Greens urged to stand aside:** A Telegraph story about senior Greens telling the party to "make way for Andy Burnham" was widely shared, with users debating whether tactical voting could help or hurt Labour
- **Restore Britain vote splitting:** Multiple tweets discuss how Restore Britain's Rebecca Shepherd could split the right-wing vote — ironically helping Burnham. "It makes no difference if Restore's share of the vote enables Andy Burnham to become PM" — Restore Britain framing this as a feature not a bug
- **Polling data shared and debated:** A widely-circulated polling tweet showed Lab 43%, Reform 40%, Restore 7% — debated intensely with accusations of bias from both sides
- **General Election implications:** The dominant narrative is that Burnham's performance in Makerfield determines whether he can challenge Starmer for the Labour leadership and become PM

Reddit Discussion

On r/ukpolitics, Burnham's candidacy is discussed in the context of Labour internal politics — whether this is a launchpad for a leadership challenge. The tactical voting debate (Greens standing aside, Lib Dems squeezing) is a recurring topic. Some threads question whether Burnham is right to use a by-election as a personal platform, with users split between seeing it as ambition or arrogance.

- [The Guardian — Burnham confirmed as candidate](#)
- [The Guardian — Burnham starts campaign with pitch for No 10](#)
- [BBC — Burnham by-election launch](#)
- [ITV — Burnham says backing him is 'vote to change Labour'](#)
- [HuffPost — Burnham launches campaign with 'clarion call for change'](#)

Robert Kenyon - Reform UK Candidate, Makerfield

Robert Kenyon — Reform UK Candidate, Makerfield By- Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Robert Kenyon
Age	~46 (born c. 1979)
Location	Wigan, Greater Manchester
Occupation	Plumber (self-employed)
Political role	Wigan Councillor (Standish ward, elected 2024)
First-time candidate	Yes (stood in Makerfield 2024 GE, came 3rd)

How They Got Selected

Selected as Reform UK candidate for Makerfield by-election on 19 May 2026. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage said they would "throw absolutely everything at it." Previously stood in Makerfield in the 2024 general election, finishing third with ~15.6% of the vote.

Key Statements & Quotes

- Called abortion "**cowardly murder**" and suggested women lie about rape to obtain abortions (24 May 2026, The Observer/Byline Times)
 - Dismissed Carol Vorderman's criticism by calling her a "luvvie" from the "London media bubble"
-

Controversies

Byline Times 419-Tweet Archive (24 May 2026)

Byline Times published an exposé of Kenyon's deleted Twitter history — 419 deleted tweets revealing:

- **Holocaust denial/revisionism:** shared content from known Holocaust deniers, questioned established death toll figures
- **COVID conspiracy theories:** called the pandemic a "plandemic", spread vaccine misinformation
- **Abortion:** called abortion "cowardly murder", suggested women lie about rape for abortions
- **Anti-Islam rhetoric:** characterised Islam as a "violent ideology"
- **Transphobic comments:** mocked transgender people, deadnamed trans individuals
- **"Great Replacement" conspiracy:** shared white nationalist conspiracy theory content
- **Climate change denial:** dismissed climate science as a "scam"
- **5G conspiracy theories:** linked 5G rollout to health risks

Carol Vorderman Criticism

Broadcaster Carol Vorderman publicly called Kenyon a "**vile online abuser**" and warned about Reform UK platforming him.

Social Media Ban

Kenyon was permanently banned from Twitter/X. His previous Reform UK account was also mysteriously suspended.

Polling

Date	Pollster	Kenyon %	Burnham %	Margin
23 May	Survation / Sunday Times	40%	43%	LAB +3

Key Partnerships & Endorsements

- **Simon Danczuk** (ex-Labour MP): campaigning with Kenyon, predicting Reform win
- **Zia Yusuf** (Reform Home Affairs Spokesperson): joined Kenyon campaigning
- **Sarah Pochin** (Reform MP): campaigned with Kenyon
- Reform UK insists it is "**fully backing**" him despite controversies

What It Means

- Reform is running an aggressive campaign in a historically safe Labour seat
- The right-wing vote is splitting three ways (Reform 40%, Restore Britain 7%, Tory 2%) which could hand Burnham a narrow win despite Reform's strong ground game
- Reform won all 8 council wards in the May 2026 locals with ~50% of the vote — significant ground-level organisation
- Kenyon's controversies could cost Reform swing voters but may energise the base

Twitter/X Discussion

“ Source: Nitter search, May 2026

Kenyon is the second-most discussed candidate on Twitter after Burnham. Key themes:

- **Fun fact widely shared:** "If Robert Kenyon wins, he will be the only Reform MP who is not an ex-Tory" — this gets repeated constantly as both a positive and a criticism depending on the poster
- **Abortion comments controversy:** "So Robert Kenyon thinks that abortion is 'cowardly murder'. I think he is a total misogynist and such views belong in the last century. I hope Makerfield doesn't vote for this man." — widely shared
- **Carol Vorderman remarks:** "Robert Kenyon again, who used his social media to post graphic, creepy sexual remarks about Carol Vorderman and female rugby players" — his past social media is thoroughly trawled

- **Richard Branson hanging comment:** "Makerfield candidate Robert Kenyon publicly demanded business leaders like Richard Branson be hanged for accepting Covid furlough money" — viewed as extremist by critics
- **Unsolicited dick pics allegation:** Defended by his supporters who push back saying "that's related to Robert Kenyon how?" when the accusation is raised
- **Veteran status:** Supporters highlight "their candidate is a VETERAN. We stand together give him your VOTE" — his army background is a key campaign asset
- **Branded "sex pest":** Multiple accounts explicitly call him this, raising questions about whether this affects his vote share
- **Tactical voting debate:** Reform supporters argue Restore Britain is splitting the right-wing vote and costing Kenyon the seat

Reddit Discussion

On r/ukpolitics, Kenyon is heavily criticised — the abortion comments, Branson hanging comment, and Carol Vorderman remarks are all recurring topics in threads about Reform candidates. The "not an ex-Tory" fact is frequently noted as distinguishing him from other Reform MPs. Some users argue the criticism shows the left "cancelling" working-class candidates.

- [BBC — Reform announces Robert Kenyon as candidate](#)
- [Byline Times — Kenyon's deleted tweet archives \(419 tweets\)](#)
- [The National — Reform candidate friends with fascist leader](#)
- [Reddit — Reform candidate calls abortion "cowardly murder"](#)
- [Manchester Evening News — Burnham by-election LIVE](#)
- [The Independent — By-election candidates](#)

Jake Austin - Lib Dem Candidate, Makerfield

Jake Austin — Liberal Democrat Candidate, Makerfield By- Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Jake Austin
Age	~26 (born c. 2000)
Born	Makerfield constituency, Greater Manchester
Location	Stockport
Occupation	Stockport Councillor
Party	Liberal Democrats

How They Got Selected

Selected as Lib Dem candidate for Makerfield on 22 May 2026. Previously stood against Andy Burnham in the 2024 Greater Manchester Mayoral election (came 6th) and stood in Makerfield in the 2024 general election.

Political History

Role	Years
Stockport Councillor (Cheadle Hulme South)	Elected 2023
Lib Dem candidate for GM Mayor	2024 (6th place)
Lib Dem candidate for Makerfield (GE)	2024

Polling

Date	Pollster	Austin %	Notes
23 May	Survation / Sunday Times	4%	Trailing main contenders

Key Statements & Quotes

- Highlights his "**born and raised in Makerfield**" roots in campaign materials
- Campaign focus: local NHS, public transport, clean air, devolution accountability

What It Means

The Lib Dems are a minor force in Makerfield — a historically safe Labour seat in Greater Manchester. Austin's campaign focuses on local issues and offering a centrist alternative, but the race is dominated by the Labour-Reform battle.

Twitter/X Discussion

“ Source: Nitter search, May 2026

Austin gets relatively little Twitter coverage as the race is dominated by Burnham, Kenyon, and Shepherd. Key mentions:

- **Accused of ignoring local concerns:** A blog post widely shared by @RestoreBritain_ claimed "Jake Austin, the LibDem candidate in Makerfield, was provided with evidence of appalling LibDem human rights abuses and planning corruption at Stockport. He wasn't bothered." — used as an attack line by right-wing accounts
- **Background mention:** One tweet listing all candidates included "Jake Austin-Liberal Democrats" as an also-ran, with the Loony Party candidate given the same billing
- **Election prediction tweets:** Consistently polled at 2-3% in amateur projections, usually mentioned in passing

Reddit Discussion

Austin is barely discussed on Reddit. The Lib Dems are acknowledged as a non-factor in this race — the seat is a Labour-Reform fight. His role as Stockport councillor is occasionally mentioned but without significant comment.

- [BBC — Lib Dems announce candidate \(Jake Austin\)](#)
- [Manchester Evening News — Burnham by-election LIVE](#)
- [PollCheck — Makerfield By-Election](#)

James Booth - Green Candidate, Makerfield

James Booth — Green Party Candidate, Makerfield By-Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	James Booth
Occupation	NHS nurse (20+ years)
Party	Green Party of England and Wales
Constituency	Makerfield

How They Got Selected

Selected as emergency replacement candidate after original candidate Chris Kennedy withdrew within hours of being selected on 21 May 2026. Kennedy withdrew after antisemitic social media posts resurfaced — he had shared a post calling an attack on Jewish ambulances a "false flag". The BBC reported the Green Party had selected a nurse as the replacement candidate.

Key Context

- The Green Party considered **not standing** at all in Makerfield to avoid splitting the anti-Reform vote
- Some voices within the party suggested backing Labour's Andy Burnham instead (per FT)
- The decision to stand was made; James Booth was selected as candidate

Polling

Date	Pollster	Green %	Notes
23 May	Survation / Sunday Times	3%	Minor factor in the race

Twitter/X Discussion

“ Source: Nitter search, May 2026

Booth himself isn't discussed much — but the **Chris Kennedy saga** dominates Green-related Twitter discourse:

- **Chris Kennedy's 9-hour candidacy:** "Less than twelve hours after being announced as the Green candidate in the Makerfield by-election, Chris Kennedy withdrew. The Party said it was for family reasons. It soon transpired that he had posted a conspiracy theory that the ambulance arson in Golders Green had been a 'false flag' operation." — widely shared
- **Accusations of antisemitism:** "Green Party candidate for Makerfield, Chris Kennedy, pulls out of race after sharing posts describing the ATTACK on Jewish ambulances as a 'false flag'. These remarks are unacceptable! Antisemitism is a common theme with the Gangreens isn't it?" — used by right-wing accounts to attack the Greens
- **Conspiracy theory defences:** "Green Party punished Chris Kennedy, the ex-candidate for Makerfield by-election. Why? As a registered nurse and a children's safeguarding specialist, he was the perfect candidate. But he criticised Israel. The rest is history." — pro-Palestine accounts defended Kennedy
- **"Shortest political career":** The joke "Green party candidate for Makerfield by-election withdraws after nine hours — shortest political career ever?" was widely circulated
- **Booth as replacement:** Coverage of Booth as the replacement is minimal — most tweets focus on the Kennedy fiasco rather than the actual candidate
- **Senior Greens urged Burnham support:** "Senior Greens 'tell party to make way for Andy Burnham'" was shared by both Greens arguing for tactical voting and by critics mocking the party's indecision

Reddit Discussion

On r/ukpolitics, the Kennedy withdrawal was a major story for a day — described as an "incredible own goal" by the Greens. Some users argued it showed the Greens are "not serious" as a political force. The debate about whether the Greens should stand aside for Labour is regularly revisited.

- [BBC — Green Party selects nurse as candidate](#)
- [Green Party — Chris Kennedy selection \(withdrawn\)](#)
- [FT — Greens consider helping Labour in Makerfield](#)
- [New Statesman — Should the Green Party stand in Makerfield?](#)

Michael Winstanley - Conservative Candidate, Makerfield

Michael Winstanley — Conservative Candidate, Makerfield By-Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Michael Winstanley
Party	Conservative
Constituency	Makerfield
First-time candidate	Likely

How They Got Selected

Named as Conservative candidate on 20 May 2026. Selected amid questions over Kemi Badenoch's approach to the by-election — the Conservatives have been largely absent from the campaign narrative, with the race dominated by Labour vs Reform.

Polling

Date	Pollster	Winstanley %	Notes
23 May	Survation / Sunday Times	2%	Trailing far behind main contenders

What It Means

The Conservative vote in Makerfield has collapsed. Once a Labour-Conservative marginal, the party is now a fringe presence — polling at just 2% and being squeezed by both Reform UK (right) and Labour (centre-left). The Tories are effectively spectators in this by-election.

Twitter/X Discussion

“ Source: Nitter search, May 2026

Winstanley gets modest Twitter coverage, mostly from Wigan locals and Conservative accounts. Key themes:

- **Former Mayor of Wigan:** "Michael Winstanley, he's a former Mayor of Wigan and a really good candidate to have. Sadly he'll be squeezed out of the picture by a bloke with questions to answer about how he refers to women and a bloke who is only doing this to further his career. It's all so wrong." — a local defending him against the national circus
- **Conservative Party promo:** Conservative accounts tweet about him positively — "Michael Winstanley, Conservative candidate for the Makerfield by-election, is sending the right message loud and clear — we are the party with the best plans and the serious vision for Britain"
- **Squeezed candidate narrative:** Widely predicted to come 5th or 6th, with one tweet predicting him to be "ahead of Labour" only as a joke. Multiple tweets question why Tories should even bother: "Shouldn't you as a Conservative be supporting Michael Winstanley?"
- **Loony Party comparison:** "Do you think that the Tory party in the by election in Makerfield will get more votes than the Monster Raving Loony Party?" — the fact this is a genuine question reflects how far the Tory vote has collapsed

Reddit Discussion

Barely discussed on Reddit. When mentioned, it's usually in the context of how far the Conservatives have fallen in their former heartlands. The "2% polling" figure is cited as evidence of the party's existential crisis in the North.

- [BBC — Conservatives name Michael Winstanley](#)
- [The Telegraph — Questions over Kemi Badenoch's approach to Makerfield](#)
- [PollCheck — Makerfield By-Election](#)

Peter Ward - Rejoin EU Candidate, Makerfield

Peter Ward — Rejoin EU Candidate, Makerfield By- Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Peter Ward
Occupation	Barrister (Manchester-based)
Party	Rejoin EU
Constituency	Makerfield

How They Got Selected

Announced as Rejoin EU candidate on 24 May 2026. The party said "rejoining the EU has come back into the British political debate in a big way."

About Rejoin EU

Single-issue party founded in 2019, advocating for the UK to rejoin the European Union. Originally led by Brendan Donnelly. Contests by-elections and local elections, usually polling 1-3% in seats they contest. Not to be confused with the Liberal Democrats or Green Party — explicitly a single-issue pro-European vehicle.

What It Means

The Rejoin EU party is a marginal candidate but their presence adds to a crowded field — 8+ candidates confirmed. Every vote that goes to a minor candidate fragments the vote further.

Twitter/X Discussion

“ Source: Nitter search, May 2026

Ward gets minimal Twitter coverage. Key mentions:

- **Announcement coverage:** "Barrister Peter Ward will be the Rejoin EU Party Makerfield by-election candidate" — shared by local news accounts and a handful of pro-European accounts
- **Minor candidate treatment:** Predicted in amateur polling projections at <1%. Generally lumped in with the "fringe" category alongside the Loony Party
- **The Rejoin EU angle:** Some Remain-leaning accounts share his candidacy as a way to "send a message" but most acknowledge the party has no realistic path to winning

Reddit Discussion

Ward is essentially undiscussed on Reddit. Rejoin EU as a party is acknowledged as a single-issue vehicle with negligible electoral impact. Some pro-European users mention the candidacy in passing but without enthusiasm.

- [BBC — Rejoin EU announce Makerfield by-election candidate](#)

Alan Howlin Laud Hope - Loony Party Candidate, Makerfield

Alan "Howlin" Laud Hope — Official Monster Raving Loony Party Candidate, Makerfield By-Election 2026

Last updated: 25 May 2026 **By-election date:** Thursday 18 June 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Alan "Howlin" Laud Hope
Party	Official Monster Raving Loony Party
Role	Party leader / long-standing candidate
Constituency	Makerfield

Background

Alan "Howlin" Laud Hope is the leader of the Official Monster Raving Loony Party, taking over from the late Screaming Lord Sutch. A perennial candidate who has stood in numerous elections across the UK, known for his eccentric platform and satirical policies.

What It Means

The Loony Party is a traditional fixture at by-elections, providing satirical commentary on the political process. Their vote share is typically negligible but they add to the colourful nature of the campaign.

Twitter/X Discussion

🗨️ *Source: Nitter search, May 2026*

Howlin' Laud Hope generates more Twitter buzz than several serious candidates. Key themes:

- **Loony beating the Tories:** The most shared narrative is "Do you think that the Tory party in the by election in Makerfield will get more votes than the Monster Raving Loony Party?" — reflecting the Tory collapse and the joke that the Loony Party might out-poll them
- **Polling predictions include him seriously:** Multiple amateur poll projection tweets include the Loony Party at 1% — treated with the same seriousness as the Lib Dems and Greens
- **"Everyone should vote Loony":** "Everyone should vote for The Monster Raving Loony Party in Makerfield and really stick 2 fingers up to the political class" — some users propose a protest vote
- **Listed alongside mainstream candidates:** "Hopefully the result at Makerfield it will be 1 Robert Kenyon-Reform, 2 Rebecca Shepherd-Restore, with every other candidate (Jake Austin-Liberal Democrats, Michael Winstanley-Conservative Party, Alan 'Howlin' Laud Hope-Official Monster Raving Loony Party) ahead of Labour" — treated as a genuine list

Reddit Discussion

The Loony Party candidacy is mentioned on Reddit primarily as a punchline about the state of British politics — the fact that the Monster Raving Loony Party being taken seriously as a potential vote-getter says everything about the 2026 political landscape.

- [PollCheck — Makerfield By-Election](#)

Greater Manchester Mayoral

Coverage of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority mayoralty, currently held by Andy Burnham, and its intersection with the Makerfield by-election.

Greater Manchester Mayoral — Current State

Greater Manchester Mayoralty — Current State & Context

“ This file covers the current Greater Manchester Combined Authority mayoralty, held by Andy Burnham since 2017. The next statutory mayoral election is May 2028. However, Burnham is also standing in the Makerfield by-election (June 2026) — if he wins, he would be both Mayor of Greater Manchester and an MP, a situation that has generated significant political debate.

Last updated: 25 May 2026

Overview

Detail	Info
Incumbent Mayor	Andy Burnham (Labour)
Term	2024–2028 (re-elected May 2024 with 63.4% of first-preference votes)
Next scheduled election	May 2028
Combined Authority	Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)
Population covered	~2.9 million

The Dual Candidacy Controversy

Andy Burnham is standing in the **Makerfield by-election** (18 June 2026) while continuing as Greater Manchester Mayor. This has generated significant debate:

- **Critics argue** he cannot effectively serve as both GM Mayor and a constituency MP
- **Supporters say** he will continue as mayor while serving as MP, using Westminster to fight for GM
- **Labour NEC** previously blocked Burnham from standing in the Gorton & Denton by-election (Feb 2026) citing the cost and disruption of a mayoral by-election if he won the seat
- That blocking by the NEC was widely seen as Keir Starmer protecting his leadership from a Burnham challenge

Key Issues

1. **Bee Network** — Flagship integrated transport scheme (bus franchising, ticketing, cycling). Now partly operational; performance and expansion plans are central
2. **Clean Air Zone** — Scrapped in 2023. Alternative non-charging plan's effectiveness is debated
3. **Housing** — GM has consistently missed housebuilding targets
4. **Devolution** — Burnham has pushed for more powers (transport, housing, skills, rail)
5. **Policing** — Mayor oversees the GM Police and Crime Commissioner role

Candidates for 2028 Election

No candidates have been formally announced as of May 2026. However:

- **Labour:** Andy Burnham is expected to stand for a fourth term if he hasn't moved fully to Westminster
- **Reform UK:** Likely to field a candidate given their surge in GM in recent local elections (won 8 wards in Wigan area in 2026 locals)
- **Conservative:** Expected to stand but faces an uphill battle — their vote collapsed to 2% in Makerfield polling
- **Green, Lib Dem:** Expected to stand as usual

Polling

Date	Pollster	Burnham %	Reform %	Con %	Green %	Lib Dem %
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May 2024 (actual result)	—	63.4%	2.4%	18.6%	8.4%	5.9%
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No recent mayoral-specific polling available. Burnham remains personally popular (>60% approval in most surveys) but Labour's national collapse in May 2026 local elections could affect his position.

Twitter/X Discussion

“ Source: Nitter search, May 2026

The mayoralty discourse is dominated by the Makerfield by-election and Burnham's leadership ambitions:

- **Leadership framing:** "Andy Burnham has plan to return to Westminster 'within weeks', allies say" — the dominant narrative is that Makerfield is a springboard for a Labour leadership challenge against Starmer
- **King of the North:** The nickname is widespread. "Well done to the shotgun press robbery by nearly every southern news rag and Labour bigwigs, slapping that daft nickname 'King of the North' on Andy Burnham" — the framing is debated between supporters who embrace it and critics who see it as a media construction
- **NEC blocking:** "Blocking Burnham wasn't just about protecting Starmer, it was about defending the Westminster Club" — the January 2026 NEC block is still discussed
- **Risk of losing mayoralty:** "Massive gamble for Andy Burnham if he resigns as Greater Manchester Mayor now. Labour's collapse in the May 2026 locals has Reform UK surging" — some warn that if Burnham leaves the mayor role, Reform could take it in a by-election
- **Dual role practicality:** "Andy Burnham is trying to please everybody at once. Makerfield, the country and the markets..." — the feasibility of being both mayor and MP is questioned

Reddit Discussion

On r/ukpolitics, the mayoral dual-candidacy is discussed in the context of whether Burnham can realistically serve both roles. The NEC block (Gorton & Denton) is frequently cited as evidence of Starmer's fear of Burnham. The "King of the North" nickname is debated — some see it as earned, others as a media narrative designed to build him up before knocking him down.

Greater Manchester Mayoral — Candidates

Candidate profiles for the Greater Manchester mayoralty (2028 election and current candidates).

Andy Burnham — Mayor & Labour Candidate

Andy Burnham — Greater Manchester Mayor & Labour Candidate

Role: Incumbent Mayor of Greater Manchester (since 2017) **Also standing in:** Makerfield by-election (18 June 2026) **Last updated:** 25 May 2026

Bio

Detail	Info
Full name	Andrew Murray Burnham
Age	56 (born January 1970)
Born	Aintree, Merseyside
Education	St Aelred's Catholic High School, Newton-le-Willows; Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge (English)
Family	Married to Marie-France van Heel; three children
Residence	Greater Manchester

Political History

Role	Years
MP for Makerfield	2001–2024
Chief Secretary to the Treasury	2007–2008

Role	Years
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport	2008–2009
Secretary of State for Health	2009–2010
Shadow Education Secretary	2010–2011
Shadow Health Secretary	2011–2015
Shadow Home Secretary	2015–2016
Labour leadership candidate	2015 (4th place), 2016 (withdrew)
Greater Manchester Mayor	2017–present (re-elected 2021, 2024)
Makerfield by-election candidate	2026

Key Achievements (as Mayor)

- **Bee Network** — First bus franchising scheme outside London; took control of buses in 2023
- **Clean Air U-turn** — Scrapped GM Clean Air Zone charging plan in 2023, replacing with non-charging alternative
- **Homelessness** — A Bed Every Night scheme during COVID
- **Devolution** — Expanded GMCA powers; pushed for rail devolution
- **Standing up to government** — Famously clashed with Boris Johnson's government during COVID Tier 3 negotiations (Oct 2020)

The Leadership Question

Burnham is widely seen as the most likely alternative to Keir Starmer for the Labour leadership. His Makerfield campaign is viewed through this lens:

- **NEC blocked** him from standing in Gorton & Denton by-election (Jan 2026) — widely seen as Starmer protecting his position
- **Allies say** Burnham has a "credible plan to return to Westminster within weeks"
- **Starmer's unpopularity** — polling consistently shows Burnham outperforming Starmer in favourability
- **If he wins Makerfield**, he becomes an instant leadership contender

Twitter/X Discussion

- **Leadership framing dominates:** "Burnham has plan to return to Westminster 'within weeks', allies say" — shared and debated constantly

- **Dual candidacy practicality:** "Andy Burnham is trying to please everybody at once. Macclesfield, the country and the markets..."
- **The nickname debate:** "King of the North" is used both positively and as a criticism
- **Electoral risk:** "Massive gamble for Andy Burnham if he resigns as Greater Manchester Mayor now" — warnings about Reform potentially winning a mayoral by-election

Reddit Discussion

Burnham is one of the most-discussed Labour figures on r/ukpolitics. The dominant threads cover his leadership prospects, the NEC block (seen as Starmer's fear), and whether he can be both mayor and MP. His record on the Bee Network is generally praised; housing targets and clean air are criticised.

Other Parties — Potential Candidates

Greater Manchester Mayoral Candidates — Other Parties (Potential)

“The next Greater Manchester mayoral election is due in May 2028. No candidates have been formally declared by any party as of May 2026. This file profiles likely candidates based on previous elections and current party positions.”

Last updated: 25 May 2026

Conservative — Likely Candidate

No candidate announced. In the 2024 election, the Conservative candidate was Nick Buckley, a local businessman and former police officer. He came second with 18.6%.

Likely profile: A local councillor or business figure. Given the Tory collapse in GM (polling at 2% in Makerfield), the Conservative candidate is unlikely to be competitive.

Reform UK — Likely Candidate

No candidate announced. Reform UK did not stand in the 2024 mayoral election (their candidate, Dan Barker, got 2.4%). However, Reform's surge in GM — winning all 8 Makerfield-area council wards in the May 2026 locals — means they will almost certainly field a serious candidate in

2028.

Likely profile: Could be Robert Kenyon if he doesn't win Makerfield, or another local figure. Reform will see the mayoralty as their best chance of a breakthrough in the North West.

Green Party — Likely Candidate

No candidate announced. In 2024, the Green candidate was Hannah Spencer, a local activist. She came third with 8.4%.

Likely profile: A local Green councillor or activist. The Greens have been growing in Manchester (won Gorton & Denton by-election Feb 2026) and may target the mayoralty more seriously.

Liberal Democrats — Likely Candidate

No candidate announced. In 2024, the Lib Dem candidate was Jake Austin (now the Lib Dem candidate in Makerfield). He came fifth with 5.9%.

Likely profile: Another local councillor. The Lib Dems are a minor force in GM mayoral elections but consistently stand.

Twitter/X Discussion

Very little mayoral-specific candidate discussion given the election is 2 years away. Most discourse focuses on Burnham's leadership prospects and the Makerfield by-election. The main theme is:

- **"Labour's collapse in the May 2026 locals has Reform UK surging — they're the clear favourites to snatch the mayoralty in a by-election"** — the risk if Burnham resigns

Reddit Discussion

The mayoral election is barely discussed on Reddit at this stage. When mentioned, it's in the context of Burnham's future — if he leaves the mayoralty, who replaces him, and could that trigger a Reform breakthrough in GM.